

THE RONGELAPESE DISASTER (harm, misfortune)

Concerning the disaster (harm, damage) experienced by the Rongelap people when the Americans tested the H-Bomb at Bikini between the hours of 5 and 6 o'clock a.m. on March 1, 1954.

First of all, there appeared a light rising from the surface of the water northwest of Rongelap Atoll. It began to appear and spread until it covered the whole sky (atmosphere) --no light (can compare) to that light. There were many beautiful colors which were most impressive to see.

When the light faded (disappeared), a smoke appeared and also spread over the whole sky. As the smoke dissipated and almost disappeared there occurred a deafening (breaking) sound which was enormous and frightening.

The people awoke from their sleep and were terrified and confused. Some ran to hide in the bushes (underbrush). They thought this was the last day (end-of-the-world), and it is reported that some repented and changed (their way of life) at that time.

During the period between 6 o'clock and 10 o'clock that morning nothing else happened. The people began to go about their work --fishing and other activities.

After 10 o'clock that morning, a powder began to fall and the sky (atmosphere, air) was dense (opaque). At this time three jet planes came and circled over Rongelap and the people thought that the reason the sky was dense and the powder was falling was because the planes were spraying it (the sky). The people were mistaken and went out of their houses and watched these planes. Then they began to feel their eyes hurting as when we get dust in them. The powder increased and fell like snow. This continued until 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon of that day --the powder covered all the soil and plants, and the islet half a mile away was not visible.

At 10 o'clock that night the people began to feel sick, especially the children, who were the most susceptible (prone to danger) and pitiful. The sicknesses (symptoms) they had (got) were itching, restlessness, stomach ache, irritableness, nausea, headache, earache, tooth ache, and aches in all the joints of the body, to such an extent

that they weren't able to move.

The next morning, March 2, 1954, the magistrate and others assessed the damage and saw that the people were sick as a result of (eating and drinking) contaminated food and water. The color of the drinking water was somewhat like blackened (dark, dirty) yellow, and its taste was more bitter than the (leaf of the) "kabwijlon" plant. Consequently these leaders told the people not to eat or drink anything, but it was too late (by then) since 24 hours had passed since the damage had occurred.

At three o'clock the afternoon of that day, a seaplane took off from Enewetak. Only two people came ashore. The people asked what their job was. They answered that they came to see how strong the effect of the bomb was. They also said that they were on the land only 20 minutes. Actually it was less than 10 minutes. They proceeded to place their poison detector in a well, and quickly left. There was no word of warning(given) to the people.

Early the next morning, March 3, 1954, a war ship came and took them to Kwajalein. After leaving Rongelap they first went and picked up 15 people who were at Ailingnae, and then came on to Kwajalein. On that day other kinds of sickness began to affect (appear)on) the people. Something that looked like blisters from a burn (fire) appeared on their bodies; blood coagulated in their fingernails and toenails, and their hair began to fall out.

When they arrived at Kwajalein island, March 4, 1954, they were given no medicine or treatment (aid, relief) other than they were told to bathe in the lagoon three times daily.

On March 6, 1954, the AEC doctors arrived and joined them at Kwajalein. They remained with them for a month and some days. During this time there was no medicine (given to them), and the only treatment (given) was this: taking their blood and pouring it out.

From 1954 to 1965 they didn't find (see, receive) any medicine for this sickness. In 1966 they finally found (saw) a medicine which would help (be appropriate for) this sickness. This medicine is called synthroid. This medicine has two ways (conditions, characteristics). If they do not drink it they will die. If they miss a

time when they should take it, this means that they loose one day of their life here on earth. The medicine cannot get rid of the swelling in the people's necks (throats). Nor can it completely heal the people from the poison of the bomb.

This is how the disaster to the Rongelap people began which happened to them in 1954, and continues (to affect them) today. As yet there is no treatment that the Americans can give which will completely heal them from the bomb's poison.

(translation from Marshallese by  
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